



Windows to Wildlife



Volume 11

Number 2

Spring 2004



A Publication of the Idaho Watchable Wildlife Committee and Idaho's Nongame Program

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The Idaho Watchable Wildlife Committee is comprised of the following agencies and organizations:

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Idaho Department of Parks & Recreation

Idaho Audubon Council

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Idaho Department of Commerce

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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Idaho Department of Fish and Game

Hardrock Habitat: Cliff Nesters of the Upper Salmon River

by Beth Waterbury – Salmon Region Nongame Biologist

Idaho's geologic history has created some of the most beautiful and interesting landscapes on planet Earth. Its complex topography has been sculpted over millions of years by sediment deposition, volcanism, thrust faults, glaciation, and erosion — even a giant meteorite! One of the legacies of these forces is an extensive landscape of cliffs, bluffs, and rocky canyons used as breeding habitat by a variety of birds. One of the best places to view spectacular cliffs and the inhabiting birds is the Salmon River Canyon between the towns of Challis and North Fork in east-central Idaho.

About 20 bird species are known to nest in the cliff/rock habitat along the Salmon River. Special geological formations such as rock outcrops, cliffs, talus slopes, caves, and crevices provide birds with nesting sites, foraging locations, retreat sites from predators, and vantage points within territories. One of the most conspicuous and abundant of cliff/rock nesters is the cliff swallow. A colonial nester, cliff swallows construct their spherical nests of mud pellets high on sheer cliff walls. The nests, lined with grass and feathers for warmth, are nearly fully enclosed to protect the birds from wind and rain. Hundreds of these mud nests can crowd a cliff face, almost appearing like part of the rock substrate itself. The advantage of nesting in such tightly packed colonies allows birds to share information about good foraging sites. Secondary benefits may be predator avoidance; many sentries can detect the approach of a predator more effectively than a few.

More widely known as tree cavity nesters, violet-green and tree swallows occasionally nest in cliff crevices, lining their rocky niche with grass and feathers. Barn swallows also utilize cliff crevices and caves as substrate for their cup-shaped nests of mud pellets, straw, and feathers (they nested *somewhere* before there were barns!). All three swallow species are known to nest in small, loose colonies among the Salmon River cliffs. Two additional species, the bank swallow and northern rough-winged swallow, also nest in the vicinity, usually in excavated or abandoned burrows located in streambanks or roadcuts.

From May to late August, the Salmon River Canyon swarms with swallow activity. Viewing these six different swallow species provides first rate birding opportunities,

continued on next page

Photos above: One of many cliff swallow nest colonies found along the bluffs north and south of Salmon, IDFG.

HARDROCK HABITAT

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including courtship flights, aerial foraging on the abundant insect life, feeding and fledging of young, and the spectacle of thousands of swallows perched on wires and fences during a summer thunderstorm.

A small black and white bird with long saber-shaped wings, the white-throated swift seems perfectly designed for life among the cliffs. This species spends most of its time on the wing hurtling along canyon bluffs at speeds considered among the fastest of North American birds. One of their most spectacular behaviors is their aerial courtship display in which a pair mate while tumbling downward, sometimes for over 500 feet! Their tiny feet are adapted for clinging to vertical surfaces, but land only when necessary. They construct nests deep in rock crevices made of feathers glued together with their own saliva. Because white-throated swifts tend to nest in small colonies beyond the reach of human observers, little is known about their breeding biology, particularly their incubation and fledging periods. In their search for flying insects, they often follow thermals high above the cliffs where they can be difficult to see. Concentrated listening for their distinct call, best described as a prolonged shrill, chattering “*je-je-je-je*” in descending scale, will eventually give their location away.

Two species of wren, the canyon wren and rock wren, occupy the cliff/rock habitats of the Salmon River Canyon. Canyon wrens are found among cliffs, rocky outcrops, and steep-sided canyons where they build nests protected by a protruding ledge or rock shelf. The base of their cup-shaped nests is made of twigs and grasses, then lined with lichens, plant down, wool, cobwebs, or feathers. The canyon wren diet consists of insects and spiders, which they probe from rocky surfaces with the aid of their flattened cranium and long slender bill. Though somewhat drab in appearance, there is nothing ordinary about this bird’s loud melodious song as it ripples down the canyon. Described as a cascading series of liquid *tee*’s and *tew*’s that decelerate and descend, the male’s song is the best indicator that canyon wrens are nearby. Rock wrens are found in rock strewn areas such as talus slopes and rock piles. Their nests, constructed of similar materials as the canyon wren’s, are built in rock crevices among boulders and other sheltered sites. Curiously, they pave the entrance to their rock-sheltered nest with small stone chips, the purpose not fully understood. Their diet also consists of insects and spiders gleaned from crevices by their long bill. Rock wrens are often identified by their characteristic “bobbing” behavior as they flit from rock to rock, fanning their broad buff-tipped tail as they land. In spring, the male rock wren becomes a virtuoso performer rivaling the mockingbird with its large repertoire of songs with buzzy, trilled, and ringing phrases.

Another interesting denizen of the river canyon is the American dipper, a small songbird uniquely adapted to cold

mountain streams, where it dives and forages for aquatic insects. Adaptations for life as a diver include nasal flaps to prevent water from entering the nostrils, a thick layer of insulating down feathers, a large preen gland to maintain waterproof feathers, and specialized vision that corrects for refraction in water. Dome-like nests are built on streamside rock cliffs or on large rocks in midstream. Nest materials include an inner cup-like lining of dry

coarse grass with an outer shell of moss and interwoven grass. Dipper chicks remain in the nest for a prolonged period after hatching, presumably to help them meet the harsh demands of their aquatic environment. Viewing these stocky solid gray birds can be challenging because of their small size, cryptic coloring, and scarcity during hot weather (they are very intolerant of heat). Training a keen eye along streambanks for their distinct “dipping” movement will usually help in detecting these birds, as will a trained ear listening for the male’s loud, bubbling, wren-like territorial song often heard year round.

Occasionally seen hovering and gleaning insects along the Salmon River bluffs is the Say’s phoebe. This member of the tyrant flycatcher family prefers to nest

in holes, crevices, and protected ledges of cliffs, rimrocks, and caves. They also nest in abandoned mine shafts and use old nests of cliff and barn swallows. North America’s largest passerine bird, the common raven, readily nests in alcoves, large fractures in cliff walls, or on protected, well-shaded ledges along the Salmon River Canyon. Their large bulky nests are usually built of stout sticks lined with grass, fur, bark, or whatever treasure caught the raven’s eye. Ravens tend to breed earlier than most songbirds and are quite secretive while incubating and tending to young. The most successful strategy for viewing nesting ravens is to scan cliff faces for evidence of fresh “whitewash” (bird excrement) and presence of stick nests. Their hoarse croaking vocalizations can also tip the viewer off to their location.

If there is a bird that embodies the rugged grandeur of the Salmon River Canyon, it is the peregrine falcon. The cliff/rock habitats of the river canyon near Salmon support several breeding pairs, distinguishing this river reach as one of the highest density peregrine breeding sites in Idaho. The return of a breeding pair to their traditional territory in early spring is marked by courtship rituals including spectacular aerial displays, courtship feeding, and repeated calling. Nest sites, or eyries, are selected on ledges of high, sheer cliffs near water and a plentiful supply of prey such as



Tree swallow

Gary C. Will/IDFG

High walls of sedimentary rock north and south of Salmon provide excellent nesting habitat. Use a driftboat to view the birdlife along the Upper Salmon River. IDFG



Young Wildlife – Best Left Alone

By Mike Demick, Idaho Department of Fish and Game Clearwater Region

Nothing pulls on the heart more than encountering what appears to be an orphaned or helpless baby wild animal. And nothing reduces the chances more of that young animal living a healthy wild existence than capturing it with the idea of raising it. The kind intentions of people who want to care for young animals is a trait that makes humans special. It is also what makes it difficult to tell them they are doing the wrong thing. With very few exceptions, taking young wildlife from the wild into a human environment is a mistake.

Past studies of young wild animals taken from their natural surroundings have shown that at least nine times out of 10, the animal was not abandoned. It was only temporarily left by the mother or was ready to begin fending on its own. The dilemma is not limited to any particular species. It may be a baby robin fallen from the nest, a lost duckling, lonely looking squirrel or a deer fawn curled up beneath the brush.

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game recommends leaving all wildlife alone to allow nature to take its course. “Most people enjoy seeing nature’s beauty, but not the cruel side,” said Jay Crenshaw, IDFG wildlife manager. “Nature will find a way to balance wildlife populations, even if it seems unpleasant to humans.” Our human instincts and logic tell us that because the mother is not within our eyesight, the youngster isn’t being properly cared for. But many wild animals often leave their offspring alone for extended periods of time to feed, rest or to find food for their young. For example, a mule deer doe will leave her young for most of the day and night, only to return to feed the young, and quickly leave again.

Many times when young wildlife are taken from the wild, their chances of survival are not improved but lessened. Wild animals generally cannot survive on diets that come from the neighborhood grocery store. Ask any wildlife rehabilitator or zookeeper with wildlife experience and they’ll tell you the job of providing the proper nutrition for wildlife is a real challenge and often is not successful. The second challenge of being able to return young wildlife to their natural environment is just as difficult. Most young wildlife learn early in life to imprint on the animal that cares for it. It’s nature’s way of bonding the two together. But when a fawn, for example, imprints on a human, it fails to learn the necessary skills required for survival that would have been taught by the doe. The fawn also loses its fear of humans. Both conditions result in a very limited potential for survival should the animal live to be released in the wild.

Although young birds, squirrels, and rabbits can be placed back in their nest, most young wildlife are better left alone. It may be very difficult, but if you care, leave them there. “Persons should approach a young songbird or squirrel the same way they would any wild animal - by leaving them alone,” said Crenshaw.

If you are worried about young wildlife you observe, note the location carefully and contact the nearest Fish and Game office. They will be able to advise you on the best action to take. In the Boise area, you can also contact Animals In Distress at 367-1026.



Deer fawn

Mark Sands/IDFG

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rock doves, chukar, starlings, and waterfowl. Peregrines do not build nests, but scrape a shallow round depression in the soil in which they lay 3-4 eggs. Peregrine adults become very quiet and secretive during incubation and early brood rearing, but increase their activity as the growing chicks require feeding up to 10 times per day. At about six weeks of age the chicks are running laps along the eyrie ledge and endlessly flapping wings in preparation for their maiden voyage. The same cliff that offers protection as a nestling can quickly become the unforgiving rock face intercepting a clumsy fledgling! Fortunately, with each passing day peregrine fledglings become increasingly skilled aerial acrobats.

Several other raptors are known to nest among the cliffs of the Salmon River. Red-tailed hawks build robust stick nests in high sheltered alcoves on cliffs. Golden eagles are rare nesters along the Salmon River Canyon, but select nest sites similar to those preferred by the red-tailed hawk. Great-horned owls are occasionally seen occupying abandoned stick nests of ravens or red-tailed hawks high in rocky canyons. American kestrels commonly nest in small rock cavities and crevices. Finally, the uncommon prairie falcon nests in potholes on shear rock ledges, preferring nest sites protected from the midday sun and situated less than 50 feet from the base of the cliff.

Whether by land or water, from a distance or neck-craning close, the cliff/rock landforms of the Upper Salmon River — and the birdlife they support — are a “must see” for those that appreciate breathtaking scenery and the genius of bird adaptations. Fortunately for bird watchers, Highway 93 winds along the Salmon River between Challis and North Fork providing ready public access to several key viewing locations. But to really experience the scale and spectacle of the cliffs and its winged inhabitants, nothing beats a river float trip on a warm day in July. Two stretches of the river are particularly scenic and rich in birdlife: 1) from the Highway 93 Bridge boat ramp at Challis to the Watts Bridge Recreation Site and 2) from the Shoup Bridge Recreation Site to either the Tower Rock or Red Rock fishing and boating access sites. Referrals for guided outfitter excursions can be obtained through the Salmon Valley Chamber of Commerce (208/756-2100 or 800/727-2540, www.salmonbyway.com).

EVENTS

International Migratory Bird Day Events

Bonniers Ferry, May 8, Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge, partnering internationally with Canada's Creston Valley WMA. Join in the fun with birding walks, kids activities, animal tracks plaster casting, and wetlands tour. Contact: Aaron Drew, Refuge Manager, 208/267-3888.

Coeur d'Alene, May 8, 9am-1pm, Mica Bay, the Audubon Society will host birdwalks, activities, and raffles. They also will dedicate the wetlands interpretive signs created by local high school students. Contact: www.cdaudubon.org; Kris Buchler 208/664-4739.

Moscow, May 8, 8am-noon, IDFG is hosting a booth at the Farmer's Market at Friendship Square (4th and Main St) in downtown Moscow, including live raptors, bird experts, bird migration information, shade grown coffee, and the Palouse Clearwater Environmental Institute. Contact: Joel Sauder, Clearwater Region Fish and Game Office, 208/799-5010, jsauder@idfg.state.id.us.

McCall, May 8, 7:30-1pm, Ponderosa State Park will host bird walks along with live bird demonstrations, bird feeder building, children's games, scavenger hunt, and many other activities. The McCall Public Library will also have story time and presentations May 6-7. Contact: Payette National Forest, 208/634-0700.

Boise, May 15, noon-4pm, MK Nature Center 600 S Walnut St, Participate in fun activities for the whole family including: viewing live birds, making paper birds, learning bird songs, seeing nests and eggs, hearing expert speakers, drinking shade grown coffee, and much more! Contact: Kris Allison, MK Nature Center, 208/334-2225, kallison@idfg.state.id.us.

Twin Falls, May 8, 9am-noon, Join Idaho Fish and Game and the Prairie Falcon Audubon Society for a morning of fun with bird walks and migration information at Buzz Landing Visitors Center, Hwy 93 and the Perrine Bridge. Contact: Scott Bailey, Magic Valley Fish and Game Office, 208/324-4359, baileys@idfg.state.id.us.

Pocatello, May 8, Pocatello Zoo will have activities, games, displays, and prizes from 1:30-4:30pm. Afterward, a tour guided by experienced birders will start at the Edson Fichter Nature Area. Contact: Martha Wackenhut, Southeast Region Fish and Game Office, 208/232-4703, mwackenhut@idfg.state.id.us.

Idaho Falls, May 15, Market Lake WMA will hold an event with IDFG, USFS, and Snake River Audubon Society members on hand to lead tours on the Marsh, and provide information on bird migration and conservation. Contact: Lauri Hanauska-Brown, Upper Snake Fish and Game Office, 208/525-7290, lbrown@idfg.state.id.us.

Salmon, May 8, Join our Nongame Biologist in a morning field trip to local great blue heron rookeries and swallow colonies along the Salmon River corridor. Learn about the specialized social behaviors and unique conservation needs of these and other colonial nesting birds. Contact: Beth Waterbury, Salmon Region Fish and Game Office, 208/756-2271, bwaterbury@idfg.state.id.us.



MK Nature Center Events

600 S Walnut, Boise

To register for the following events, Contact Kris Allison, 334-2225, kallison@idfg.state.id.us

April 17th, The Snake River Birds of Prey, 1:00-2:00 & 3:00-4:00pm

Learn why their conservation area is such a unique place and see live raptors; Swainson's Hawk, Great Horned Owl, and Short-eared Owl. Fee \$3.00 adults, \$2.00 twelve years old and under.

April 24th, Idaho Native Plant Society Plant Sale, 10am-2pm

Stop in to buy your native plants for spring planting and learn about sustainable gardening.

May 1, Nature Photography, 1:00-4:00 pm

May 15, Wildlife Photography, 8am-11am

Diane Ronayne, Boise-based free-lance photographer and former editor/art director of the Idaho Wildlife Magazine, will teach these workshops covering the art and science of seeing and interpreting natural subjects, composition, creative techniques and field tips. Fee: Adults - \$8 per session or \$10 for both. Youth 11 to 18 yrs—\$3 per session or \$5 for both.



Salmon Region Natural History Series

Back by popular demand, IDFG's Salmon Region will once again sponsor a free summer Natural History Lecture Series. Six lectures are planned from June through August. Subjects will include owls, mountain goats, mustelids (the weasel family), chinook salmon, and geology of the Salmon-Challis region. Contact: Beth Waterbury, 208/756-2271 or bwaterbury@idfg.state.id.us.

THANK YOU

Thank You to All Contributors

Our sincere thanks go to all supporters of the Nongame Program, financially or otherwise. Without your contributions, the Nongame Program could not conduct critical research, hold wildlife viewing events, or publish this newsletter. The following people made direct donations, purchased or renewed a wildlife license plate, or let us know of their tax checkoff donation. These lists represent only newsletter subscribers who have returned a subscription form between December 1, 2003–February 29, 2004, and marked the contributor box. Many subscribers not listed here have contributed generously and Idaho's nongame wildlife thanks all of you.

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Volunteer Opportunities

To maintain information on the over 400 nongame species in Idaho, we need your help. If you have good observation skills, the ability to observe nests and/or birds for long periods in all kinds of weather, and have your own optic equipment, we need you. To inquire about opportunities, contact the Nongame Biologist at your Regional Office. Thanks for your help.

Panhandle-
Coeur d'Alene 208/769-1414
Clearwater-Lewiston 208/799-5010
Southwest-McCall 208/634-8137
Southwest-Nampa 208/465-8465
Magic Valley-Jerome 208/324-4359
Southeast-Pocatello 208/232-4703
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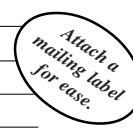
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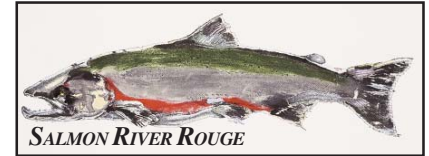
Four Sockeye Prints

In 1991, only four Sockeye Salmon returned to Redfish Lake to spawn. Redfish Lake is named after these brilliant red fish that were so abundant, that the entire lake would turn completely red. In November 1991, the Sockeye Salmon was listed as an Endangered Species. The cycle of the salmon ends with this return trip to Redfish Lake to spawn. The fish die soon after. To preserve the image of these remaining 4 fish, a "Gyotaku" was taken. Also known as Fish Printing, the fish are painted, then pressed onto a piece of paper. The original 1991 fish printing was transformed into a beautiful print named Redfish Return. Three other prints have been created since, and all are for sale. Four Sockeye donates 5% of the proceeds to the Nongame Program, adding up to over \$1500 since 1997. Four Sockeye continues to enlighten the public of the plight of these and other Threatened and Endangered Species. If you are interested in these prints, contact Four Sockeye. Please note that Salmon River Rogue is close to selling out. If you reserved numbered prints, make plans to pick them up now.

Four Sockeye, Dealing in Threatened and Endangered Art
Partners, Rick Alsager, Doug Young, and Dan Baker
3800 S. Powerline Rd. Nampa, Idaho 83686
208/467-7199, www.foursockeye.com

Four limited edition prints

1997 - Redfish Return - sockeye salmon 30"x30" \$70
1998 - Salmon River Rogue - chinook salmon 24"x44" \$100
2000 - Spring Fling - steelhead 33"x34" \$85
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